

MASTER

FILE



Montana Department
of Transportation

ENGINEERING DIVISION MANAGEMENT MEMO

Management Memo number: **ENG-03-01**

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Date issued: October 23, 2003

Date effective: October 23, 2003

Date revised: N/A

Subject: Context-sensitive solutions on projects

To: All offices

From: Joel M. Marshik, P.E., Engineering Division Administrator

Joel
10/23/03

INTRODUCTION

Although safety and mobility are critical design elements, there is an increased demand for us to preserve and enhance the natural environment as well as the livability of communities. The challenge is to employ innovative ideas and solutions while remaining cost-effective.

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the Federal Highway Administration published *Flexibility in Highway Design* as a guide to assist state highway departments in meeting the provisions found in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and the National Highway System Designation (NHS) Act of 1995. The intent of this document is to encourage innovative thinking when considering community values.

In the majority of its projects, MDT has considered context-sensitive solutions throughout the project development process but has typically waited to apply cost-effective solutions in the final design. In some of these projects, the determination of final context-sensitive solutions to be implemented has been the result of a long and sometimes frustrating process. There has to be a more effective way to do business.

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PURPOSE

The intent of this memo is to:

- reinforce MDT's commitment to work with communities and local stakeholders to assure that MDT transportation facilities meets their needs as well as the needs of the traveling public
- establish that pursuing context-sensitive solutions is to be an integral part of all phases of all projects – **it must become part of our organizational culture**
- provide conceptual guidance to staff regarding the context-sensitive design solution decisions that they will make while nominating projects, evaluating needs, prioritizing, designing, constructing, and maintaining highway projects

POLICY

Start early

Making context-sensitive solutions part of our culture means beginning *early* in the project selection process and continuing on through design, construction and maintenance with consideration for community and customer values and needs.

Involve local government and citizens

To help the process get off to the best possible start, remember to include all affected parties (e.g. local government) and those with a partnership interest (e.g. Federal Highway Administration.) In fact, to make this concept work, local government and citizens **must** be a genuine part of the process and feel they have been heard...otherwise we are just offering lip service.

Balance wants, needs, money and the law

Since the availability of transportation funds will also continue to be a major factor affecting decision-making during the project development process, balancing the needs of the community with safety/mobility and multiple project needs will certainly challenge the transportation designers of the future.

And, of course, any context-sensitive solution must be accomplished within the parameters of existing laws, rules and regulations.

- *Think “outside the box”– innovation is key*

No “cookie cutter” approach is available on exactly how to approach context-sensitive solutions.

- *Listen and keep an open mind*

Be willing to listen to our customers – some of our best solutions come from them. Individuals and communities will have different ideas on what constitutes the ideal context-sensitive solution in any given situation. The fact that there are differences does not mean there is a “right” or “wrong” outcome.

Support, teamwork and communication

To make this policy work at MDT, all staff need to support context-sensitive solutions, recognize the physical and financial limitations involved, and communicate as a team to make the best possible decision.